

ERIE COUNTY DEP ANNUAL REPORT 2020



Department of Environment & Planning

In my 35 years with Erie County, there has never been a year like 2020. COVID changed the rules for everyone. I am very proud to say that DEP pivoted, responded, collaborated, worked remotely at times, played a critical role in the County's COVID response/recovery, and still delivered our programs without missing a beat.

- Thomas R. Hersey, Jr., Commissioner

Planning and Economic Development

Planning and Land Development
Office of Agriculture
Office of GIS
Community Development and Housing
Office of Business Assistance
Arts & Cultural Program

Environmental Compliance Services

Sustainability
Climate Action Initiatives
Solid & Hazardous Waste
Natural Habitat Parks
Stormwater Management
Watershed Protection

Sewerage Management

Erie County Sewer District Operations

Downtown Management / Administrative Support Functions

Department of Environment & Planning

DEP played a critical role in implementing some of the County's most important initiatives in 2020. DEP staff lead or support over 70 committees, boards, and task forces!

- 1RF Implementation Council
- 1RF Learnings Series Committee
- Ag & Farmland Protection Board
- Ag Business Park Steering Committee
- Ag District Open Enrollment
- BENLIC Board of Directors
- Bethlehem Steel Site Steering Committee
- BNCC Steering Committee
- BUDC Board of Directors
- Buffalo Niagara Film Commission
- Buffalo Place Board of Directors
- Buffalo River Remedial Advisory Committee
- BYO Coalition
- Capital Projects Committee
- CDBG Consortium
- Census 2020 Complete Count Committee
- Community Climate Change Task Force
- COVID Business Task Force
 - Steering Committee
 - Small Business Subcommittee
 - Ag & Food Systems Subcommittee
 - Back to Business Program
 - COVID PPE Grant Program
 - Child Care Task Force
 - Shop 716 Challenge
- EC 200
- EC Lands Advisory Committee
- EC Hazard Mitigation Plan Update
- ECHDC – Terminal A Advisory Committee
- ECHDC – North Aud Block Advisory Committee
- ECIDA/ILDC Boards
- Environmental Management Council
- Erie Arts & Cultural Advisory Board
- Erie County Green Team
- Erie County Sewer District Boards of Managers (7)
- Erie County Water Quality Committee
- ErieNet Broadband Task Force
- Fair Housing Board
- Fair Housing Partnership Board
- Fisheries Advisory Board
- Food Policy Council
- GBNRTC Freight Study Committee
- GML 239 Intergovernmental Review
- Lake Erie Watershed Protection Alliance
- Live Well Erie Task Force
- NFTA Light Rail Extension/TOD Advisory Committee
- Niagara International Transportation Technology Coalition
- Niagara River Greenway/Buffalo and Erie County Standing Committee
- Northeast Southtowns Solid Waste Management Board
- Northwest Communities Solid Waste Management Board
- NIITEC
- NYSAC County Planning Directors
- NYS AC Climate Resiliency Work Group
- NYSAR3 Board of Directors
- Olmsted Parks Long Range Planning Committee
- Senior Services University Express
- Shoreline Trail Steering Committee
- Southtowns Planning & Development Advisory Group
- Springville Dam Steering Committee
- VBN Destination Master Plan Steering Committee
- VBN Sports Commission
- Western Chapter – NY Water Environment Association Board of Directors
- WEDI Microenterprise Collaborative
- WNY Stormwater Coalition
- WNY Sustainable Business Roundtable

Planning & Economic Development



Planning & Land Development

The Office of Planning and Land Development enhances Erie County's quality of life through comprehensive planning regarding County land use development, enhancement of County Park and community assets and the development of shovel-ready sites which provide the setting necessary for economic growth and tax base stabilization.

2020 ACCOMPLISHMENTS



- **Bethlehem Steel Redevelopment** – Completed Master Plan/GEIS, secured funding for Infrastructure upgrades, Spec Building RFI
- **Agribusiness Park** Master Plan/GEIS Initiated
- **Shoreline Trail** - Dona St to Woodlawn Beach Design/GEIS
- **Shoreline Trail** – Niawanda Park to Aqua Lane design complete, Construction contract awarded
- **Isleview Park Enhancement** funding secured
- **Evans Shoreline Trail** Phase 3 completed
- **BNCC Improvements** – Stakeholder engagement, consultant mgmt., Steering Committee
- **Conducted 481 GML 239 and 73 SEQR Reviews**
- **Land Use Training** for over 150 municipal Planning officials
- **\$6.7M of Capital/Operational funding** for community, tourism, and neighborhood organizations
- **Niagara River Greenway Standing Committee** – funded 6 projects totaling \$1.3M
- **IRF Implementation Council/2020 Learning Series** – Helped to organize 4 virtual Learning Series sessions reaching over 200 local planners/officials

Planning & Land Development

Future Activity/Improvements: EDZ GRANT – WATER & SEWER



Alternatives 1, 2, & 3
Figure 2

2021 PRIORITIES

- Bethlehem Steel Redevelopment – Complete future Odell and Ridge water/sewer design, construct Spec Bldg
- Agribusiness Park – Complete Master Plan/GEIS, Construct water tower/lines. Secure funding for construction
- Bethlehem Shoreline Trail – Begin Dona St to Woodlawn design, start land acquisition
- Isleview Enhancement Project – Begin design
- Evans Shoreline Trail – begin Phase 2 construction
- Shoreline Trail Enhancement – Complete Construction
- Parks Signage and Wayfinding RFP/completion
- BNCC Improvements – complete prior to reopening
- Provide Land Use Training for over 300 municipal Planning officials via our training and 1RF Learning Series

Office of Agriculture

Created to address the loss of farmland in Erie County and to support to viability of the agricultural economy, the Office of Agriculture (OA) was forced to adapt to better support farmers and municipalities as they navigated the COVID-19 pandemic. The OA, alongside the ECDOH, helped to facilitate on-farm COVID-19 testing for farm laborers and farmers. The OA heavily promoted buying local during the pandemic and will continue to support farmers and agriculture.

2020 ACHIEVEMENTS

GRANT FUNDING - Five towns received funding to update their comprehensive plans or zoning ordinances with a focus on agriculture and farmland protection.

ERIE GROWN AND ERIE GROWN PASSPORT - Developed and launched Erie Grown and companion program Erie Grown Passport (EGP). Over 140 farms and farm-related businesses are currently listed on the website. The EGP incentivizes local purchasing by offering prizes to those who visit Erie County farms.

FOOD POLICY COUNCIL (FPC) - Drafted the FPC's Food Action Plan – a comprehensive roadmap for stakeholders to work towards achieving an equitable food system.

AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS - Administered the NYS Agricultural District program, adding over 1,000 acres of farmland in 2020



2021 PRIORITIES

- Fund additional municipal agricultural planning efforts.
- Update the Erie County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan.
- Continue to develop and market Erie Grown and the Erie Grown Passport.
- Review and consolidate the Marilla, Wales, and Elma Agricultural Districts into the Central Consolidated District.
- Support Erie County and municipalities in all agriculture-related efforts.
- Explore opportunities for increased local purchasing by County facilities.

Office of GIS

The Office of GIS (OGIS) was the first DEP Division to respond to the COVID Pandemic in February 2020. By March 19th, OGIS rolled out the County's COVID-19 Dashboard, providing daily updated information to the public while transitioning to a remote workforce. Throughout 2020, OGIS provided critical mapping and data visualization support to the Administration and various Erie County Departments responses.

2020 ACHIEVEMENTS

COVID-19 Map Dashboard - Daily tracking of County COVID-19 cases. Received three million total hits since March 2020, including over 110,000 hits per day at its peak.

Virtual Learning Center Map Application - Available child care locations supporting LiveWell Erie's Child Care Task Force and the Child Care Resource Network

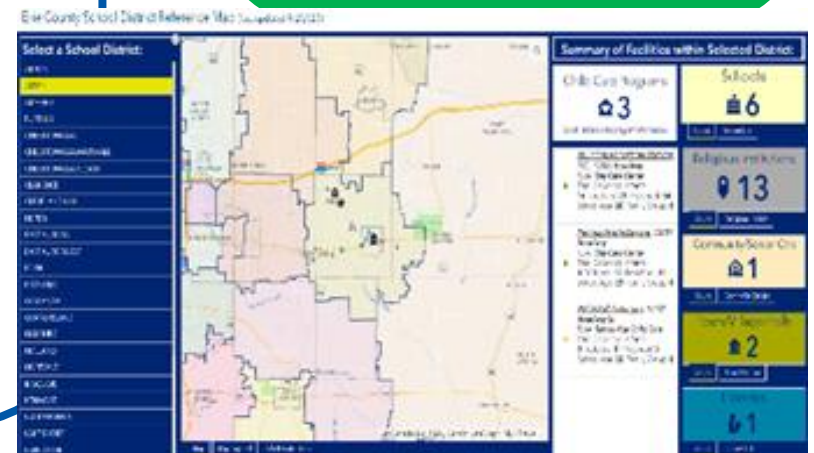
Erie Count Parks Locator - County park locations, links to park websites, and directions to parking areas for undeveloped parks.

Erie Grown Online Map - Farm locations, COVID-19 protocols, open hours, & produce availability

2020 Census Support - OGIS provided critical county data and input to the US Census Bureau

2021 PRIORITIES

- Continuing support to County COVID-19 response efforts
- Support to the DEP ECS Watershed Management Plan
- Provide mapping support to the Erie Co Low Income Program for Sustainable Energy program (ECLIPSE)
- Professional development for OGIS staff in latest GIS software



Community Development and Housing

In 2020, DEP expended \$1,907,791 of CDBG funds on 15 community infrastructure projects. These CDBG dollars leveraged \$660,309 in local government matching funds for a total economic impact of \$2,568,100.

The projects included; road reconstruction, water/sewer line replacement, sidewalk replacement, food pantry improvements, senior center and senior services upgrades, ADA improvements at public facilities and Smart Growth improvements in central business district areas.

2020 ACHIEVEMENTS

Completed 67 Housing Rehabilitation Projects - 67 owner occupied home rehabilitation projects were completed for a total of \$1,234,970 in CDBG and HOME funds.

Completed Micro-Loan/Grant Small Business Assistance Projects - 8 projects were completed for a total of \$280,000 in CDBG funds.

Food Pantry Assistance - CDBG Funding to Feedmore NY for 20 Food Pantry's for a total of \$134,088 in 2020.

Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) Assistance - \$307,127 in ESG funds were expended to assist the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless populations.

2021 PRIORITIES

Manage CARES and ARP Funds following HUD Guidance:

- Micro-Enterprise Loan/Grant Program for Small Businesses- \$1,115,000
- Food Pantry Assistance- \$260,000
- Housing Counseling Services- \$100,0000
- Community Revitalization Recreation Improvements Projects- \$1,361,149
- Senior Citizen Center Covid-19 Safety Improvements- \$750,000
- HOME Funds to incentivize affordable housing development: est \$4M

Arts & Cultural Funding

DEP delivered on County Executive Poloncarz' commitment to supporting arts & cultural organizations in 2020, despite the daunting fiscal constraints caused by the COVID Pandemic. In 2020, 101 applications were submitted to the EACAB for funding, of which 99 were eligible Cultural organizations. DEP processed awards totaling \$6,956,060.

2020 ACHIEVEMENTS

Cultural Funding Program

- New culturals applications – 3 levels as a more equitable system for smaller organizations, developed with Legislator Baskin, sector feedback, and community groups.
- 'Presenting' webpage – free, publicly accessible online catalog of cultural funding recipient information and programming.
- Culturals application moved completely online, removing propriety software hurdles. Included new Cultural website for the County, to highlight cultural and arts beyond the application (in initial stages).
- DEP launched the 'Inclusive Culturals Initiative' with the WNY Community Foundation, to increase awareness and implement efforts to increase equity and diversity within the ten largest cultural organizations in Erie County.

2021 PRIORITIES

- Implement Inclusive Cultural Initiative
- Enhancement of Erie County Presenting webpage
- Continue to fund arts and cultural organizations in Erie County



Office of Economic Development

The Office of Economic Development saw some changes in 2020 with a shift to business assistance, especially in response to COVID-19. Substantially increasing the office's collaborative efforts with industry partners throughout Erie County, as well as various departments within the County and DEP, was a major priority that has been extremely beneficial to the Economic Development Office's ability to assist the business community.

2020 ACHIEVEMENTS

Erie County Business Task Force

Creation of the Small Business Subcommittee to establish strategies and deliverables to assist the small business community.

Back to Business COVID Relief Grant Program

\$20M in funding, over 5,000 applications accepted, 1,399 eligible businesses awarded.

Back to Business Shop716 Buy Local Campaign and eGift Card Redemption Program

To date 751 businesses have participated. \$1,146,520 in eGift Card sales.

Back to Business Resource List

Creation and distribution of a condensed list of resources for small businesses for easy access.

Webinars and Small Business Virtual Events

Hosted a multitude of webinars and business networking events.

Erie County CDBG Microloan Program

Intake of 131 inquiries, 45 referrals, and 8 loan approvals.

ECIDA COVID Relief PPE Grant Program

\$500,000 in grant funding was available in 2020. 83 applications received, the Office of Economic Development assisted in the selection of 57 grant awards.

2021 PRIORITIES

- Reloading the Back to Business Shop716 Buy Local Campaign and eGift Card promotional program
- Creating a comprehensive online business resource portal
- Transitioning the Buffalo Niagara Film Commission into it's own not-for-profit organization
- Moving forward with ErieNet, establishing a business plan for the County's broadband utility
- Continued involvement in the ECIDA COVID Relief PPE Grant program, additional \$500,000 in funding available.

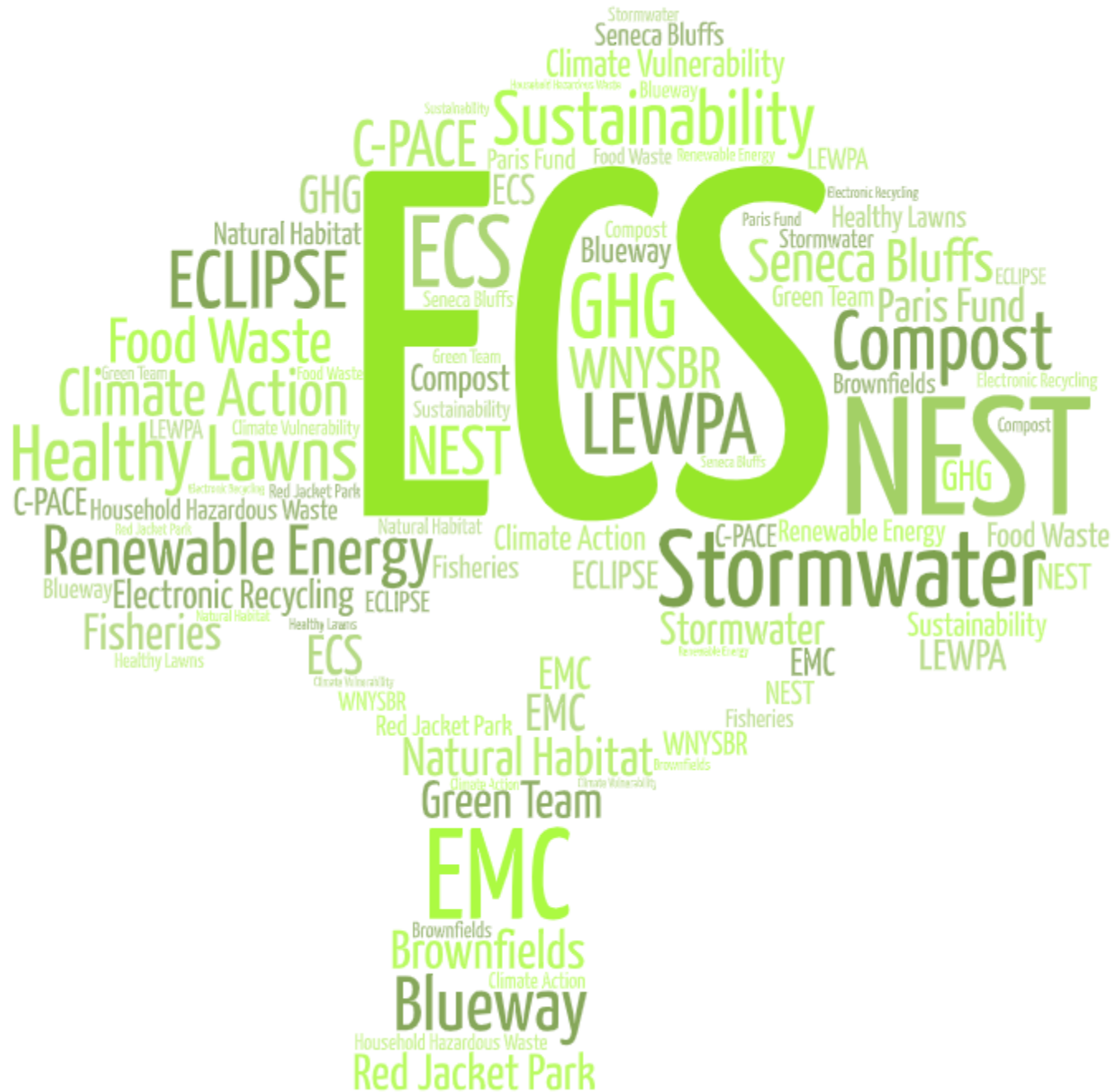


**BACK TO
BUSINESS**

SHOP SAFE. SHOP SMART.
SHOP ERIE COUNTY.

Erie County Small Business Resources

Division of Environmental Compliance Services



Erie County Green Team and CASP

A critical mission of ECS is to mitigate Erie County's impact on our climate. ECS facilitates the Erie County Green Team made up of County Departments and agencies, which implements initiatives outlined in the Erie County Climate Action & Sustainability Plan (CASP). ECS also is responsible for measuring and communicating progress of the CASP.

2020 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Engaged the Green Team to improve recycling in County buildings.
- Worked with the Green Team to identify water conservation projects that were then implemented by DPW including updating water fixtures to automatic, low-flow fixtures.
- Through the Paris Fund, replaced expensive and outdated propane heating systems with air source heat pumps at Parks Buildings.
- Recognized employees through the "Caught Green Handed" program.
- Completed the 2019 GHG inventory, which indicated that 2019 GHG emissions have decreased 29.7% since 2005, and 3.0% since 2014.



2021 PRIORITIES

- Continue to facilitate the Green Team and implement the CASP.
- Identify additional opportunities for reduction of transportation emissions through updates to the County fleet and commuting policies.
- Strive for NYS Climate Smart Communities Silver Certification.
- Measure the significant greenhouse gas emission reductions achieved through the Energy Performance Contracts.
- Reinstate full Paris Fund.

Community Climate Action

DEP is working to help our community prepare for, respond to and be resilient in the face of Climate Change. ECS is working with the Environmental Management Council's Community Climate Change Task Force (C3TF) to assess threats, develop plans and implement programs to both reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to our changing climate.

2020 ACHIEVEMENTS

Community Climate Action Plan (CCAP) - The C3TF is leading the County's equity-centered Community CCAP process which produced a scoping document, draft plan outline, timeline, and public outreach and engagement strategy.

Climate Vulnerability Assessment (CVA) - ECS released the Erie County Climate Hazards Summary Report which assessed the threat of climate change to our community, and identified climate hazards that will be the focus of the CVA.

Open C- PACE. The local law to enable this energy financing tool in Erie County was passed.

Clean Energy Communities. Erie County was designated a Clean Energy Community by NYSERDA, and will receive a grant award in 2021 for this accomplishment.



The Community Climate Action Plan is being developed in 2021, with completion anticipated in 2022.

2021 PRIORITIES

- Engage the community to develop an equity-centered Community Climate Action Plan.
- Complete the Climate Vulnerability Assessment, including reports on climate sensitivity and the County's capacity to adapt to climate change.
- Partner with the WNY Sustainable Business Roundtable on Community Solar campaign.
- Work with DPW, Social Services, and community stakeholders to develop a program to reduce energy burden and increase access to renewable energy for low/moderate income residents.

Solid and Hazardous Waste

Halloween HHW in Boston



2020 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Completed and received approval from NYS for 10 year, comprehensive Local Solid Waste Management Plans that were prepared on behalf of Erie County's Solid Waste Management Boards.
- Completed construction, trained staff and began operation of the county's food composting program at the Alden Correctional Facility.
- Reimagined household hazardous waste (HHW) services by creating contactless HHW collection events and launching a HHW Voucher program allowing residents to drop-off waste six days a week, all year round. The voucher program served 1,000 households and three HHW events served 1,100 households.
- Provided education & outreach for Plastic Bag Ban rollout.
- Developed interactive webinars to provide recycling and pollution prevention education to a variety of audiences.

2021 PRIORITIES

- Incorporate the new NYS Latex Paint Recycling extended producer responsibility (EPR) law into our HHW program.
- Expand compost activities at Alden Correctional Facility in support of the NYS food scrap diversion goals.
- Work with stakeholders and researchers to create a WNY unified menu of recyclable items, and increase use of the Recycle Coach tool.
- Planning work to continue to improve access to HHW program.

Buffalo River/Natural Habitat Parks

Critical initiatives of this group within ECS include delisting the Buffalo River as an Area of Concern (AOC), removing beneficial use impairments (BUIs) to the Buffalo River, public education and outreach, and building partnerships with stakeholders to promote stewardship within Erie County's Natural Habitat Parks.

2020 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Buffalo River BUI #2 – “Tainting of Fish and Wildlife Flavor” was approved for removal on June 25, 2020.
- Partnered with Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper to design Buffalo Blueway improvements at County Natural Habitat Parks: kayak launches, fishing access, passive recreation features.
- Completed an engineering feasibility study and conceptual design for green infrastructure improvements to the frontage of Seneca Bluffs Natural Habitat Park.
- With safe social distancing and COVID-19 protocols, from July to September, 101 volunteers removed 585 lbs. of litter from the Buffalo River shoreline

2021 PRIORITIES

- Complete Buffalo Blueway improvements at Erie County's Natural Habitat Parks.
- Continue work to eliminate BUIs/delist the Buffalo River as an Area of Concern.
- Continue Buffalo River partnerships and stewardship activities.



Buffalo Blueway
Red Jacket Riverfront Natural Habitat Park
Conceptual Design

Watershed & Stormwater

DEP's Watershed and Stormwater initiatives include the Lake Erie Watershed Protection Alliance (LEWPA), the Regional Niagara River/ Lake Erie Watershed Management Plan, the Western NY Stormwater Coalition (WNYSC), NYS Stormwater Permit compliance assistance to municipalities in Erie County, and GIS Mapping of municipal storm sewer systems to aid in detecting and eliminating pollutants impacting local water quality.

2020 ACHIEVEMENTS

- Implemented water quality improvement projects will prevent 624 tons of sediment, 616 lbs. of nitrogen, and 1,227 lbs. of phosphorus from entering waterways annually.
- Awarded a \$501,000 grant from NYSDOS to complete a nine-element Watershed Management Plan
- WNYSC municipalities/agencies submitted annual reports in conformance with NYS's June 1, 2020 deadline; including 10 trainings involving 233 people;



Before and after: West Cazenovia Creek Restoration Project, Colden (Sept. 2020)

2021 PRIORITIES

- Expand stream assessments, water quality training for municipal and elected officials, identify pollution hot spots in the watershed and continue water quality improvement projects.
- Begin stream assessments in the watershed to identify problem areas as part of the Watershed Management Plan.
- NYS Stormwater Permit compliance assistance: continue municipal trainings, new public education initiatives, outfall inspections
- Delineate storm sewer system catchment areas for 42 municipalities.

Division of Sewerage Management



Division of Sewerage Management

The Division of Sewerage Management (DSM) overcame tremendous challenges to continue 24/7 operations in the midst of a pandemic. Throughout 2020, the core mission of the Erie County Sewer Districts (ECSDs) was fulfilled; namely, protecting public health and enhancing the environment through critical wastewater services. To further assist our community, the DSM led coordination efforts with the University at Buffalo, the Department of Health, and local sewer service providers to create a program testing wastewater for the presence of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. This program provides data to assist with understanding the prevalence of COVID-19 in our community.

2020 ACHIEVEMENTS

Maintained 24/7 operations throughout the pandemic:

All ECSD facilities were safely staffed, critical work continued, and no abnormal service disruptions were experienced.

Continued delivery of capital improvements:

In addition to millions spent on asset management/maintenance, completed over \$7.6 million in construction work to improve ECSD infrastructure.

Advanced important long-term initiatives:

Numerous engineering tasks were completed on critical projects; most significantly regulatory approval for the Southtowns Facility expansion plan.

Created a platform for tracking COVID-19 through wastewater:

Lead the local effort to develop a wastewater testing program to provide the Department of Health additional information for its COVID-19 response.

2021 PRIORITIES

- Continue safe operation of ECSD facilities within pandemic restrictions.
- Bid / complete construction projects in all ECSDs.
- Advance engineering work on numerous long-term initiatives to better position the ECSDs for potential infrastructure funding.
- Issue the Request for Proposals for design of Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Southtowns Advanced Wastewater Treatment Facility expansion plan.
- Release the public dashboard for Erie County's "tracking COVID-19 through wastewater" project.

